

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

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TOWARD LIBRARY-LABOR COOPERATION

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The more progressive modern labor unions are engaged not only in a struggle to raise the standard of living and improve the working conditions of their members, but in a genuine effort to build a more just and decent society. In this effort they grapple not simply with matters of wages, hours, sanitary conditions, and union recognition, but with efforts on the legislative and political fronts to insure a stable economy, to eliminate unemployment, to protect civil rights, and to promote world peace. The UAW-CIO for instance sends its officers to testify before Congressional Committees on such varied matters as offshore oil, rent control, installment credit controls, cooperative housing, limitation of debate in the U.S. Senate, and Point 4 proposals. This same union has sponsored wide-ranging plans, such as Reuther's proposals to check the spread of communism and achieve world peace, or his program for the conversion of government-owned aircraft plants to the mass production of low cost housing. The UAW also did considerable research in developing a proposal designed to prevent and later alleviate unemployment in early 1952, caused in part by faulty planning of the mobilization effort, and with the possible production of light, low-cost automobiles in an effort to conserve the steel supply. The latter project appeared as an article entitled "A Motor Car Named Desire".

Even the more usual and routine activities of unions entail detailed preparation and research. Contract negotiations involve preparation of statistical data on conditions in the industries concerned, comparative wage data, accurate job descriptions, knowledge of pricing policies, corporation profits and accounting devices used sometimes to conceal or distort these profits, as well as close knowledge of the accuracy and precision of government statistical measures such as the Consumers' Price Index. Industrial disputes involve the preparation and presentation of complicated legal and economic briefs before agencies such as the Wage Stabilization Board and the National Labor Relations Board. A grievance on speed-up can involve very detailed knowledge of production standards and time and motion study techniques. Labor unions are forced continually to deal with big companies, spending \$50,000 for research, with big government, and with increasingly complex problems. Their need for information and facts and for comprehensive research is thus both urgent and obvious.

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AMERICAN LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Although in many cases, labor unions draw directly on government agencies and even private organizations for the data they need, the bulk of their information must inevitably come from available printed sources, and here the library--public, university, or union--is in a position to play a crucial role. Few labor unions have the funds or the research staff to compile their own statistics or to do original research in many fields, even though a great deal of this is of necessity done simply because many existing statistics and much basic research are inadequate or reflect management bias.

In discussing the use of libraries by labor unions and their members, you have to bear in mind that two different types of needs are involved. One is the research need of union officers and staff members; the other the educational and recreational needs of union members themselves. Although the two needs are tied together to some extent through the unions' own educational and recreational activities, they make different demands on libraries and require different treatment.

THE UAW-CIO LIBRARY

Our library at the UAW-CIO is set up largely to handle research needs. This library has been in existence since early 1948 and during that time we have built up a collection of about 6,000 books in the fields of labor, economics, industrial relations, social security, statistics, and the automobile, aircraft, and agricultural implement industries. We have probably 15,000 pamphlets, clippings and reports and subscribe to about 600 periodicals currently. An attempt has been made to have a basic labor history and UAW-CIO history collection in our own library, although we draw on the Detroit Public Library, and to a lesser extent, that of Wayne University, for additional material and for material in related subjects. Similarly, we try to have in our own library the basic statistical sources we need and use constantly--employment and wage data, retail and wholesale prices, cost of living indicators, data on loans, construction, business failures, corporation profits, etc. We are

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Contributions of news and articles are welcomed by the editor.

especially concerned—and this cannot be emphasized too greatly—with current, up-to-the-minute information and we need it at our finger-tips. We can, unfortunately, rarely depend on public libraries for that type of thing, because it has been our experience that the complicated technical processes of a large public library militate against the quick availability of such information, and furthermore it is difficult to borrow for on-the-spot use.

Our library is a part of the UAW-CIO Research Department, and its heaviest use comes from the staff of that department. The library is also used extensively by the Education, Political Action, Public Relations, and Social Security Department of the International Union, and to a lesser extent by local unions and outside organizations, students, professors, etc. The kind of questions we handle varies from requests for simple factual data such as the average, hourly earnings of auto workers, the initiation fee of the Machinists' union, the size of the crowd at an Eisenhower campaign speech, the profits of the aircraft industry in a given year, a phrase from a speech by C. E. Wilson, or the number of Negroes in Detroit to questions requiring background material and exercise of judgment. Typical of the latter are requests for the best books on labor history, examples of biased press coverage in election campaigns, arbitration cases illustrating the right of unions to be given information on how production standards are determined, material demonstrating the effects of unemployment on the average worker, or a bibliography on industry-wide bargaining.

HELP FROM DETROIT PUBLIC LIBRARY

Although many of these questions can be answered by use of material in our own library, hardly a day passes when we do not have to call on the Detroit Public Library for supplementary information. We call on it especially for books outside our field of specialization, for material in back files of magazines or newspapers which we cannot obtain or lack the storage space to keep, and for facts not available in our limited sources. We call the Public Library very frequently for biographical data on corporation executives or government figures, for historical materials such as the effect of the Depression on auto workers in the '30's, for speech texts in newspapers, for the status of a bill in Congress, corporation ads in magazines, technical information in connection with certain industries, and for comprehensive coverage of a given subject like the guaranteed wage.

The function of both the union library and the public library in relation to union needs can be illustrated by the work done by the UAW-CIO on the guaranteed wage. The Union set up a Committee to study the subject and to attempt to formulate a tentative plan. The chairman of the Committee, who is also our Research Director, immediately asked the Library to prepare a complete bibliography on the subject and to obtain as much of the material as possible for the use of the Committee. This work entailed first of all a search of our own resources for materials; but it also involved many trips to the Public Library to search indexes, bibliographies and the catalog for the material, a looking-up and reading of the items for evaluation, and the use of Public Library photostating facilities to obtain newspaper and magazine articles long out of print and unavailable. This bibliography and these materials were used as background for Committee members in their discussion of the subject and their formulation of a plan which we hope in one form or another will some-day become an actuality and ensure auto workers and others greater economic security.

I believe that union research needs are best served through the intermediary efforts of the union's own library for several reasons. The existence of a library within a union employing personnel trained in the use of library resources first of all ensures that union officials will be made aware of the facts and data which libraries can supply. Secondly, a union library is in a better position to effectuate

a good working relationship with the surrounding public libraries and to see that books can be readily borrowed and library red-tape circumvented when necessary. And finally, close knowledge of the day-to-day activities of a labor union makes it possible to know exactly what is wanted in connection with a given request in a way that the average public librarian cannot. But certainly no union library can possibly function without the broader resources of the large public library and specialized knowledge of its personnel. It serves as a bridge, and a necessary one. But it can only be that, except in a very limited sphere.

"LABOR INFORMATION CENTERS"

Obviously, however, not all unions, not even all international unions, can afford to maintain their own libraries and employ trained librarians. They have to depend almost completely on the public and university library resources available to them. Here I think it really behooves the libraries to make more effort to provide unions with specialized services equivalent to those provided business organizations. A great many public libraries have set up "Business Information Centers" where a genuine effort is made to provide information needed by the corporations; such centers also serve labor unions, there is less emphasis given to that phase of the work and less publicity. It is high time that a few "Labor Information Centers" were set up, preferably in cooperation with the unions, and their services given wide publicity among labor groups.

The role of the library, in-so-far as the educational and recreational needs of the rank and file are concerned, is a different one and although perhaps potentially a greater one, it seems to have rarely been adequately played. Librarians have tried for many years, sometimes earnestly, sometimes half-heartedly, to reach this mass of prospective readers and information seekers with little success. The workers, despite all the wooing through films, discussion groups, Great Books classes, bright book jackets, entertainment for their children, and visits to their union halls have remained relatively unenthusiastic. It is a problem not entirely solved by union education directors either and it is admittedly difficult. Although sometimes library materials are not adequately geared to the needs of the average union member, the problem seems to be largely psychological. The average worker simply isn't at ease in, or familiar with libraries and their services. He doesn't know what is available, he doesn't know what is available, he doesn't feel free to go in his working clothes, perhaps he is too tired or the library is too far away, or he doesn't know how to ask for what he wants when he gets there and often as a result he doesn't get it.

TAKING BOOKS TO THE WORKERS

Again I feel that the only way to reach the workers is through unions. The Detroit Public Library for instance supplies books and magazines for the UAW-CIO Retired Workers Drop-In Centers which have been set up by the union's Recreation Department. Although the books have been relatively neglected so far and the magazines only a little less so, the newness of the service makes this perhaps not too significant. The few books which are read are "how-to-do-it" books, those connected directly with a definite activity. Even though the books are not used heavily, the older workers using these centers are proud of their library and never fail to point it out to visitors. Again the presence of the books and the Library's willingness to supply them apparently has a psychological value. Detroit also sends a collection of books every summer to the FDR Camp on Lake Huron which is operated by the Michigan CIO Council and has a varied program of classes and other educational activities for union members and their families. Books are sent both for the adults and for the children during their period at the camp. Librarians from different institutions all over the state take turns operating the library at the camp and their actual presence is probably even more important than the availability of the books. It demonstrates

to the workers that libraries and librarians do care about them, that they are genuinely interested, and it gives the librarians a chance better to understand union members and their interests and to gain first-hand knowledge of them. A leaflet prepared by the Detroit Public Library (originally for the Michigan Federation of Labor), concretely outlining some of its available services, has been requested in quantity by the Michigan CIO for distribution this summer at the camp.

According to the UAW-CIO Education Director, the supplying of books to local unions is most useful and successful when the union hall is near the plant and has adequate reading and browsing facilities. This makes it possible for the workers to come directly from their jobs, dressed as they are, and this fact frequently makes all the difference. Local 599 in Flint has a library of this type and its use has been very extensive.

Another important contribution of public libraries along this line has been and is the supplying of educational and informational films to union locals for their meetings. The response of the workers to films and visual aids has almost always been enthusiastic.

Since one big hiatus between the libraries and the workers is lack of knowledge on the part of the latter as to precisely what libraries can offer them, another important avenue of approach is through write-ups of library materials in labor newspapers. This has not been done extensively, although it was done, quite successfully I believe, in Cleveland. The labor book lists done by the Newark, New York, and Boston Public Libraries are along this line and were found very useful by the unions. But if this type of thing is really to reach the people toward whom it is pointed, it should have wide dissemination in labor circles; the labor paper, especially the local paper, is the best means of approach. More can be done with this sort of thing than merely to point up books and pamphlets and give an idea of their content and use. Some attempt can also be made to indicate the informational resources of libraries--as for instance through a question and answer column geared to workers' interests.

I hope that in a small way I have managed to indicate some of the needs of labor unions and their members which can be met through libraries and their services. The great barrier preventing adequate library-labor cooperation is lack of knowledge and information, lack of knowledge on the one hand of available services and on the other, of actual needs. In view of this, it is most important for a closer relationship to be achieved. This must usually be initiated by libraries and librarians. True understanding and appreciation of the aims and ideology of the union movement is valuable background for this, and one very good way to gain this background is to join and participate in the activities of library unions. In any case, it is certainly necessary to work closely with the unions, with a view to helping them set up their own libraries or providing deposit collections whenever possible, and to take some part in union educational activities. In this way unions will truly benefit from the vast library resources available and libraries will extend and enrich their areas of service.

LOS ANGELES CONFERENCE

A panel discussion, How Can Libraries Best Serve Labor? will be held by the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups during the ALA conference in Los Angeles. The meeting is scheduled for Wednesday evening, June 24, from 8:30 to 10:00. It is an open meeting.

The library's viewpoint in the panel will be presented by Mrs. Dorothy Kuhn Oko,

New York Public Library, who will describe the work of a separate department; Ida Goshkin, Akron Public Library, who will describe service to labor as a part of group services; and Dorothy Bendix, Detroit Public Library, who will consider combined service with other departments. There will also be a representative of organized labor on the panel.

NEWS FROM LIBRARIES AND UNIONS

The Wisconsin CIO contributed \$250 to the American Heritage Project discussion group in La Crosse, Wisc. Libraries and unions interested in taking part in The American Heritage program should write the American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, Ill. A guide for American Heritage discussion leaders "Talking Together," has been prepared by Ida Goshkin and R. E. Dooley and is available from the Association.

The New York Public Library jointly sponsored the second annual exhibition of "Leisure Time Activities of Trade Unions," April 23 through May 6. Twelve unions contributed paintings, photographs, sculpture, and handicraft of members. There were gallery talks, demonstrations, and film showings.

The Pan American Union's publications, "Development of Public Libraries in Latin America," offers suggestions for library services to labor. A manual on such services is in preparation.

The United Automobile Workers, AFL is completing its fifth year of the "Labor Great Books Program." Thirty books on labor and contemporary affairs have been selected and reviewed for the membership. Librarians interested in being placed on the mailing list for these reviews should write to the union's educational director, Francis A. Henson, 429 W. Michigan St., Milwaukee 3, Wisc.

CORRECTED FILM PRICES

The following corrections should be made in the film prices in the article, Labor Films in Libraries, appearing in the last issue of this newsletter:

On page 4, the price for Carelessness Costs You should be \$60. On page 5, the price for Trowbridge Story of Housing should be "approximately \$20."